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Sermon on the Gospel for the Fifth Sunday after Trinity.

(Preached on a Synodical Sunday.)

LUKE 5, 1—11.

Our text contains an account of Peter's miraculous draught of fishes. Rationalists deny that there was anything miraculous about this draught. They tell us that Jesus in crossing the lake had seen a large number of fish at a certain place and had then told the fishermen to let down the nets at that place. But this is foolish, for the Lord gave the two commands, to launch out into the deep and to let down the nets, at the same time; and He gave these commands when the boats were still near shore. But even if Jesus had given the command to let down the nets while the boats were crossing the lake, would it not seem strange that He who was regarded as a mere carpenter should have seen what the keen eyes of experienced fishermen had failed to see? And how could Peter's surprise and astonishment at the immense draught be explained, if everything had taken its natural course and nothing miraculous had occurred? No! There can be no doubt, the Lord Jesus performed a miracle when He sent that vast throng of fish into Peter's net.

By that miracle He proved that He was the almighty God, who created heaven and earth, and who has dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. All the inhabitants of earth and sky and sea must obey His word and do His will. This miracle proves clearly that Jesus is both omniscient and omnipotent. It is a credential of His divine mission, a proof that He is a teacher come from God. But it not only certifies and attests, it also illustrates and teaches. All of Jesus' miracles are symbols and illustrations of heavenly truths as well as instruments and vehicles of those truths.

Thus the cleansing of the lepers from their leprosy is a picture of the cleansing of sinners from their sin; the rebuking of the storm on Galilee's sea is a picture of the rebuking of the storms that rage against the Church and in the bosom of a Christian; the healing of the deaf man's bodily ailments is a picture of the healing of the sinner's spiritual ailments; the raising of Lazarus from physical death is a picture of the raising of the natural man from spiritual death. And so Peter's draught of fishes is a picture of the Church's mission and trials. This, then, is our subject for this morning:

THE CHURCH'S MISSION AND TRIALS.

1. *Her mission;*
2. *Her trials.*

1.

Our text tells us of Peter's mission or work. What was it? By occupation Peter was a fisherman. When Jesus first called him, He found him employed fishing, for we read: "And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon, called Peter, and Andrew, his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers." In the text Jesus tells Peter: "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught." Peter's mission, Peter's work was to catch fish. He had tried to catch some during the previous night. He had not been idle, but had worked, and had worked hard, for the text says that he "toiled." And he had worked long. Not an hour or two merely had he spent at his work, but he had toiled "all the night." And when Jesus now said to him: "Let down your nets for a draught," he again went to work. Note, also, that he worked in the right manner. He said: "At Thy word I will let down the net." Not was he guided by his experience or by the opinion of others, but by the word of Jesus. Obeying Jesus' word, he worked in the right manner and in the right place. He did not fish near the shore, but launched out into the deep. He used also the right means, for he let down a net. And this his work, which he performed in the right manner and in the right place and with the right means, was crowned with success. Peter "inclosed a great multitude of fishes."

Peter's work is a picture of the Church's work, for Jesus said to Peter: "From henceforth thou shalt catch men." This is the Church's work, the Church's mission: to catch men, to capture them for Christ, to take them alive. The Church, *i. e.*, all her members, whether pastors or laymen, whether rich or poor, whether old or young, whether male or female, — all are to work. They are not to stand idle at the market-place of this world, but to go into the vineyard and labor. There is work to be done. And God has called you and me, dear Christian, to do this work. God's Church is not to be

asleep, but to be awake and to be up and doing. She is to work, and to work hard. Her members are to spend and to be spent in the Lord's work. They should not become weary, discouraged, or disheartened, but be active, diligent, and zealous. They should bend to the oars. They should exert themselves. They should use all the powers at their command. And they are to work long. As Peter fished not only during the day, but "all the night," and afterwards devoted his whole life to the service of the Lord, so the members of the Church are to work "all the night," *i. e.*, while the night of sin reigns, which means: until the end of the world. Unceasingly the Church is to work. Day and night she is to let down the net for a draught; day and night she is to go after the straying children of men; day and night she is to draw immortal souls to Christ. And this her arduous and constant work she is to perform in the right manner. Her motto must ever be: "At Thy word, O Jesus, I will let down the net." The Word of Jesus must be the Church's guide. Not the dictates of human reason, not the wisdom and learning of the world, not higher criticism or science falsely so called, not the experience of men or a time-serving policy, should guide the Church, but the inspired and unerring Word of Jesus. This Word gives the best, the surest, the plainest directions for doing the Lord's work. This Word should be a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. Unto this Word we should take heed as unto a light that shineth in a dark place. And taking heed unto this Word, we shall do the Lord's work in the right manner and in the right place. Ere Peter followed Jesus' word, he had fished near the shore, but now he launched out into the deep. Even so the Church is to launch out into the deep. Her Master's command is: "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. Go and make disciples of all nations." True, we are not to proselyte and build on other men's foundations, but it is also true, when we see men by the wayside neglected, wounded, bleeding, dying, yea, dead in trespasses and sins, we are not to pass by on the other side like the priest and the Levite, but, like the good Samaritan, we are to go to them, and pour oil and wine into their wounds and bind them up, and take them into the inn of the Christian Church. This we are to do at home and abroad, for Jesus' words are strong and clear: "Go ye into all the world," not only into this or that city, but everywhere; "Launch out into the deep," *i. e.*, fish not only near the shore, near home, but also far out on the sea of this life. Moreover, when Jesus says: "Launch out into the deep," He calls for large ideas, for bold enterprises, for heavy undertakings, for brave adventures, for a heroic plunging into the thick of things. One reason why the Church does not accomplish more is, because she does not attempt more. O let *us* launch out into the deep, let *us* make great efforts, let *us* undertake much! Here

is the Lord's command: "Launch out into the deep." And the Lord shows us, also, what means we should use, namely, the Gospel-net. "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel." True, we are to preach the Law also, for the Lord says: "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgressions, and the house of Jacob their sins." But preaching the Law is only preparatory work. It leads men to a knowledge of their sins. It shows them their lost condition. It reveals to them the wrath of God on account of their sin. It causes them to despair of self. All this, however, is preparatory work in bringing them to Christ. The real, the proper, the principal work of the Church is to preach the Gospel, to show the sinner that he has a Savior in Christ Jesus. This work the Church performs when she tells men to behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world, when she directs men to Jesus, saying, "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed," for "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The doctrine of Christ's vicarious suffering and death, the doctrine of justification by faith, is the Gospel-net which the Church is to let down into the sea of this world. In other words, the Word and the Sacraments are the means, the only means, which the Church is to employ in drawing souls to Christ. And using these divinely appointed means according to the Lord's directions, the Church cannot fail in her efforts. Peter's work on yonder sea, performed according to the Lord's directions, was crowned with success. The Lord's promise: "Let down thy net for a draught," was fulfilled; Peter inclosed a great multitude of fishes. So the Church has the Lord's promise that her work shall not be in vain. The Lord says: "As the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall my Word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." We see this fulfilled, for instance, on the first day of Pentecost. When Peter on that day launched out into the deep with the Gospel-net, he inclosed a vast multitude, even three thousand souls. And so it was ever. Wherever the apostles let down the net for a draught, they drew immortal souls to Christ. And what they did their followers did also. And the success they met with, their followers met with also. As soon as Luther let down the Gospel-net, vast multitudes were drawn to Christ. And does not God still crown the work of His Church with success? When our fathers came to America and

began to preach the pure Gospel of a crucified and risen Savior here in this Western Hemisphere, did not God establish the work of their hands? And has not God blessed the work of our own little English Synod? What is our convention here in these days but a visible sign and proof that the Lord's work is not in vain? "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

Our text, however, treats not only of the Church's work or mission, but also of her trials and dangers; and this is the second point to which I would direct your prayerful attention.

2.

Our text shows us that Peter and his companions had their trials. They had toiled all the night, and had taken nothing. Though they had used the same boat and the same nets; though they had chosen the best time and the most promising places; though there had been no lack of earnestness, energy, or continuity in their efforts: yet there was no success. They returned to the shore empty-handed, disappointed, and sad. They were wearied and disheartened by failure.

And so it often happens with the endeavors of the Church. We do our best, and yet accomplish seemingly nothing. Our best efforts are sometimes without visible fruits. Which of God's workmen in the days of yore did not experience this? Did not Noah, the preacher of righteousness, see men despise the Word of the Lord and perish? Was not the righteous soul of just Lot vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked, and did not his own sons-in-law despise his warnings from the Lord? Did not Isaiah lament: "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" Did not Paul and Barnabas say unto the Jews: "It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles"? Yea, did not Christ Himself see many of His disciples go back and walk no more with Him, and did He not then turn to the twelve and say sadly, "Will ye also go away?" And which of us has not at times been obliged to lament the non-success of his efforts? Yes, the Church has her trials. Even the wisest and best of spiritual fishermen are compelled at times to return and say, "Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing."

Such trials beget discouragement. The danger is that we will lose faith and heart and hope, and give up in despair. Peter could hardly be induced to make another cast of the net, even with Christ in his boat urging him to do it. He did not consider it worth while

after his experience of the previous night. But this was a yielding to the flesh and to erring human reason. How did he overcome it? He heard Jesus' word: "Launch out into the deep," he believed this word, and he did according to this word. Thus we, too, can and should overcome our trials and discouragements. Hear Jesus' Word, believe this Word, and act according to this Word! The very next effort may compensate for all the fruitless toil that has gone before it. Rely not on your own wisdom, skill, or experience, but hear and heed Jesus' Word. Though seemingly you may be working in vain, success will come eventually. There is a story told of a woman who had a rare rosebush. She watched and worked over it for weeks, but saw no results of her labor. One day she found a crevice in the wall near the bush, and, running through the crevice, was a tiny shoot of her rosebush. She went to the other side of the wall, and there she found her roses blooming in all their splendid beauty. Some of us, perhaps, have to work in church or school or Sunday school or synod year after year, seeing no results of our labor. To such comes this message: "Work on! Do not be discouraged! Your work is blooming on the other side of the wall." My brethren, there is no such thing as wasted time or labor if we are serving the Lord Jesus and doing His work. Peter experienced this.

But a second trial awaited Peter and his companions. When they had let down the net at Jesus' command, "they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake." Success as well as failure had its trials and dangers. The coveted prize, for which they had toiled all the night, was within reach, when, lo, the net brake, and the fish began to escape. Here was a new trial. What did the fishermen do to overcome it? Why, "they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink." Here we have co-operation. In our work and in our trials we should co-operate with each other. How sad when this is not done! How sad, when, instead of co-operation, we find jealousy, envy, spite, hatred, strife, or contention among Christians! Who does not deplore the contention which was so sharp between Paul and Barnabas that they parted company. O that all Christians might heed what the apostle says: "I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." If this were always the case, what great things could be accomplished! O then, let us, as members of our congregations and as members of our Synod, co-operate and help one another in doing the Lord's work. What a beautiful and blessed thing it is when Christians encourage, help, and strengthen one another! The Psalmist says: "Behold, how

good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." And high praise was bestowed upon Job in the remark: "Thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees." God grant that we may go hence from this Synod more firmly resolved than ever to beckon to, and work with, one another. Then we, too, shall overcome our trials and discouragements, and experience the Lord's blessing.

When Peter saw what had happened, when he beheld the immense draught of fishes which they had taken, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying: "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Peter humbled himself; he realized that it was the Lord's doing, the Lord's blessing, and this goodness of the Lord led him to repentance, led him to humility. Even so we should humble ourselves under the gracious hand of God. Though we may and should plant and water, it is God who gives the increase. And when He gives it, we should say: "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory." Yes,

All glory be to God on high,
 Who hath our race befriended!
 To us no harm shall now come nigh,
 The strife at last is ended;
 God showeth His good will to men,
 And peace shall reign on earth again;
O thank Him for His goodness!

Amen.

O. K.

Anniversary Sermon.

1 Cor. 15, 58.

Few and evil are the days of our life; few are the hours of rejoicing and true happiness. Our stay in this world is but of a short duration, and during this stay irksome labor, painful trials and temptations are our perpetual companions. Yet, occasionally, sweet moments of rest and recreation, moments of happiness and gladness, are granted unto us, and these again quicken our enfeebled limbs, lift up our drooping spirits, and urge us on to the duties incumbent upon us.

Such a day of rejoicing and gladness is for you this present day. You assembled in your house of worship this morning and in the afternoon, and you meet here again this evening to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of your congregation. Twenty-five years ago to-day a small band of Lutherans of this locality united in

establishing a Lutheran congregation and adopted a constitution, in which they declared and confessed that the Bible, the inspired Word of God, alone was and should be norm and rule of doctrine and practice among them. They determined from the very beginning that only God's Word pure and simple should be preached from their pulpit, the sacraments be administered according to their divine institution, the members be held to lead God-pleasing lives, and all those that would not submit to the same be expelled from their fellowship. With such a narrow creed for its basis the congregation had poor prospects for success. It was then undoubtedly with much fear and trembling that the small band of people put their hands to the blessed work.

But behold, dear friends, how the Lord has been with those few, how He has approved of their strict adherence to His word, and how bountifully He has blessed their work! The few of those days have grown to be a large congregation numbering hundreds of souls. The congregation of to-day owns a stately church edifice, an enlarged parsonage, and a roomy school. Step by step they have grown to be what they are to-day. But while they were growing, they did not outgrow their faith in the Scriptures as the Word of God, nor their faith in the Gospel as the only means of salvation. While in many other churches of to-day the Gospel has been set aside, and science, literature, and politics have taken its place, you, dear friends, have to-day, by the grace of God, the same doctrine which your fathers had. In your church and your school the Word of God and Christ crucified reign still supreme as they did twenty-five years ago.

Twenty-five years is a long period of time, in which many congregations have dwindled down into small numbers, and in which others, though they have grown in numbers, have suffered the Word of God to be dethroned and human reason to be enthroned. Since neither has been the case with you, oh, rejoice and be exceedingly glad! But while you are rejoicing, take heed lest you do ascribe your success and your steadfastness to yourselves, or to your labors, offerings, and battles. Not unto you, no, not unto you, but unto the Lord let all your praise and thanks be given. It is He that has blessed you, that has given you strength and zeal, that encouraged you when you were faint, that kept you when you were in danger of falling, and that consoled you when you were in need of comfort. Unto Him, then, unto Him let all your praise to-day be directed. Let your soul to-day say and let your lips exclaim: "I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live, I will sing praise to my God, while I have my being."

Or are there some among you that cannot cheerfully join in the praise of the Lord? Are there some that have become weary and

weak and faint? Oh, I beseech you, be steadfast and unmovable! Arise, and let this jubilee, this day of common rejoicing, be an encouragement to you to take up that good fight of faith with new love and zeal. You have been doing a noble work in the past, and your work has not been in vain. May, therefore, all members of this congregation on this memorable day be encouraged to renewed steadfastness in the work they are doing for the kingdom of the Lord. With this purpose in view, let me now, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, advance the question:

WHAT SHOULD ENCOURAGE YOU TO REMAIN STEADFAST AND UNMOVABLE IN THE WORK WHICH YOU HAVE BEEN PURSUING THE PAST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS?

I answer, —

1. *The fact that it is the Lord's work which you have been doing;*
2. *The fact that your work is not in vain.*

1.

You, dear friends, you and your various pastors have been working the past twenty-five years. When you first came to this place, you worked in the dense forests, transformed them into rich and beautiful fields, in order to obtain a home, food, and raiment for you and those dear unto you. But while you were working for the needs of your body, you at the same time began to provide for the wants of your soul. You had learned in the days of your childhood, and knew from experience, "that a man is not profited if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul." You knew that in spite of wealth, honor, and glory man is an unhappy, wretched creature in time and eternity. From the very beginning, therefore, you worked with united efforts also for your soul's welfare. You erected a house of worship where your souls might lie down in the green pastures of the Gospel, where they might be refreshed from the labors of the past week and be strengthened for the trials and temptations of the week to come. You called into your midst a pastor and commissioned him to preach unto you both Law and the Gospel, to rebuke the wicked, to confirm the weak, to comfort the depressed, and to console the sick and dying; you commissioned him to baptize your children for the remission of their sins, to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and to prepare them for their first communion; you commissioned him to labor among you with the means of grace, both publicly and privately, and to do all that behooves a faithful steward. And while your pastor, all pastors that ever were called by your congregation, zealously were working to save that which is lost, you simultaneously were working with prayerful hearts to increase your membership and to

raise funds with which to support your pastor and to maintain your church.

Thus you and your pastors have been working the past twenty-five years, at times with more, at other times with less love and zeal, but continually working and progressing. And do you feel sorry for what you have done? Have you become discouraged in your work? O behold what a blessed, what a noble work it is that you have been doing! It is the same work which the congregation at Corinth, to which St. Paul addressed the words of our text, was doing; it is the same work which every true Christian congregation must and will gladly do: it is the work of the Lord. Mark! Man was created in the image of God, in perfect righteousness and holiness. But he transgressed the command which the Lord had given him, and thereby became wicked and depraved, and alas! not he alone, but the whole human race was by that one wicked deed permeated with sin and subjected to death and damnation. There was now a gulf between man and God, which divided them and made it utterly impossible for man ever to come to God and to heaven's bliss and glory. Since then man by his own reason and strength never again could be reconciled unto God. The Lord Himself became the peacemaker; "for God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Having assumed the form of sinful flesh, the Son of God fulfilled in our stead, as our proxy, the entire Law to the full satisfaction of the Father, and with His innocent suffering and death atoned for our guilt. Behold how He trembles in the garden of Gethsemane, how His sweat turns into great drops of blood, and how His body is pressed down into the dust! Behold how He is abused by the Jews, how He is scourged, mocked, deformed, and finally crucified by the Roman soldiers! O what He suffered, His agony and the mockery He had to bear, was the reward for our transgressions. We nailed Him to the cross, we struck the death-blow at Him; "for He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities." But since that has come to pass, the Father is reconciled, the world is redeemed, sin, death, and Satan are conquered, and heaven is regained. Because Christ, God's and Mary's Son, suffered willingly and faithfully for fallen mankind, He has obtained righteousness and salvation for each and every sinner, for all that are lost. And now, to bring all men into possession of these precious gifts by the means of grace, by the Gospel and the holy sacraments, to bring them to faith and salvation, that is the work of the Lord. This work Christ performed when He sat in the temple among the doctors teaching them, saying to His mother who sought and rebuked Him: "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" This work He pursued with untiring

zeal and joy during the three years of His public ministry, and when finally He could no longer visibly perform this work, He commissioned His twelve apostles to do the same, saying: "Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." His work, then, is at the same time a work of the church, of all true believers, for they are, as St. Peter puts it, "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that they should show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness unto His marvelous light."

This work, which aims at the salvation of lost but redeemed souls, you, dear friends, have pursued the past twenty-five years, and undoubtedly you have done it gladly, knowing it to be the work of the Lord. But you should perform it also in future with cheerful hearts. God wants willing workers in His kingdom. He wants men and women, youths and maidens, who are inspired with love and zeal for the cause of His kingdom. And should you not be willing to do even more for the work of the Lord at home and abroad than you have done in the past? Aye, you will, if you bear in mind the mercies of the Lord. If you consider what God has done for you, how Jesus, your Savior, has labored, prayed, and suffered for your salvation, you will ever be ready to serve Him in His kingdom.

It is true, the work which a Christian congregation is to perform is not an easy task, for our enemies, Satan, world, and our own evil flesh, are continually attempting to hinder us in the same. Wherever a church is built and the Gospel is preached, an invasion is made into the kingdom of Satan, and so Satan arises, in order to stop and destroy the blessed work. An old German saying reads: Where God builds a church, Satan will build a chapel alongside of it. That is but too true. This Prince of Darkness has already wrought much havoc in Christian churches, has thrust the members into quarrels and strife, and would have dispersed them in every direction, had not God in time stayed his wicked intentions.

Then there is the world, another bitter foe of a Christian congregation. When a number of Christian souls have united in prayer and worship and are walking in the paths of righteousness, then comes this cunning, deceitful world, and in leading some of them astray tries to bring the whole work to naught. Especially does the world attempt to ensnare the young, and experience amply teaches how successful it is. How many of our young Christian friends who once stood at the altar of the Lord and vowed faithfulness unto Him and His Church have forsaken their God, abandoned church, and become a prey of the world! Alas, the world is bringing to ruin many a Christian soul, and is a constant menace to a congregation.

And finally, still another enemy causes a Christian congregation much grief and strife. I mean our own evil flesh. St. Paul, in

speaking of his flesh, says: "The good that I would I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do." So it is with every true Christian. According to the new man within him he is ever ready and willing to work for Christ's kingdom, but according to his flesh he dislikes, aye, even abhors the work to be done in the vineyard of the Lord.

When a Christian congregation, therefore, celebrates its twenty-fifth anniversary, it will naturally also look back to the battles that have been fought in the past with Satan, world, and flesh. Also your congregation, dear friends, has not been without such battles, also you have been caused to suffer, sigh, and weep in pursuing the work of the Lord. That, however, ought not discourage, but rather encourage you. You know that there is no exaltation without humiliation, no victory without battle, no crown without cross. Though, then, the work of the Lord be a difficult work, nevertheless, be all the more diligent in the same, be all the more steadfast and unmovable, for only those are crowned that keep faith and persevere unto the end.

2.

But still another reason should encourage you to remain steadfast and unmovable in the work which you have been pursuing the past twenty-five years, and that, according to our text, is the fact that your work is not in vain. In the history of every congregation there have been periods when the Word which was preached seemed to have but little or no effect at all, periods, when many become worldly and drop off, and the congregation, instead of making headway, seems to be going backward. Such periods also your congregation undoubtedly has experienced; and was it then not with fear and trembling that you looked to the future?

It is an exceedingly sad thing when one must work in vain. Think of the disappointment of a gardener who, after having well cultivated his soil, set his plants properly, watered them, and given them good care, finds in the end that all his labor has been in vain. St. Paul, therefore, exhorts the members of his congregations repeatedly to accept the Gospel and live in true accordance with it, in order that he may not, at the last day, find to have preached to them in vain.

But it is equally sad for one to suppose that he is working in vain, though actually it is not the fact. That was the case with Jonah who did not want to preach to the people at Nineveh, because he imagined he would preach to them in vain. Such was also the case with the prophet Elias when he sat under a juniper tree, and requested the Lord to let him die, because his preaching seemed to him in vain. But the Lord revealed to him that his work was not

in vain, for He said unto him: "I have left me seven thousand in Israel, which have not bowed their knees unto Baal."

God's Word is never preached in vain, and a congregation working with this Word is not working in vain. God says of His Word: "For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth and maketh it bring forth and bud that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater: so shall my Word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Wherever the Word of God is preached it will always bring some fruits, it will strike roots in the hearts of some, lead them to faith in Christ Jesus, and bring them unto eternal life. It may be that for a long time after the Word has been preached, no fruits are visible, but fruits there will certainly be, either sooner or later. It would be foolish of a farmer who has sown seed one day to look for fruits already the next day; but if he patiently waits some weeks or months, he will in all probability see the fruits of his labors. And if thus, in the kingdom of the Lord, we learn not only to labor, but also to wait, we will in time see the fruits of our labors, and even though we should not be fortunate enough to see them in this world any more, they will be revealed unto us in the world to come.

Oh, then, dear friends, what an encouragement it must be unto you on this day of your twenty-fifth anniversary to know that you have not been working in vain. Though it often appeared to you as if you were laboring in vain, with the Word of God you have at all times lifted up some depressed soul, brought some nearer to God and some unto eternal light and salvation. Think of it: twenty-five long years you have been active in the service of the Lord! How often during this time has the Gospel been proclaimed both publicly and privately; how often has Holy Communion been administered; how many children have been baptized in your midst, and how many prepared for the parting hour of death! How much seed, then, has there been sown! And it will yield abundant fruit. Some of it you have already witnessed in your own lives, some in the lives of your children, some in the lives of those who were added as members. But I trust that the greater part of it is yet hidden from your eyes. It will be revealed to you on that great day, when Christ will sit on His judgment throne and mete out unto every one according to his merits. Then you will vividly behold what you, as a congregation, and what each individual soul among you has done to bring sinners to faith and salvation. And if you are then found to have been faithful to your charge, if then your children and others arise before you and in the presence of the Father confess your name as one by whose aid and efforts they have been brought to light and life, you will celebrate a jubilee far more glorious than the one over which you

are rejoicing to-day, and will everlastingly praise the Lord, because He has here in time permitted you to labor in and for His kingdom. Therefore, dear brethren, I repeat it: "Be ye steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labor is not in vain." Amen. FR. F. S.

Outline for Epistle of Fourth Sunday after Trinity.

ROM. 8, 18—23.

"No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous," Hebr. 12, 11—that is the verdict of our nature on the troubles which man undergoes in his present life. It is natural for man to chafe under restraint, to fret over his ills. He considers himself privileged to grumble and complain under adverse circumstances. And his worldly friends, more fortunate than he, can offer him poor comfort in his misery. They may moralize to him that it is more aesthetic and heroic to bear one's misfortunes gracefully; they may counsel stoic indifference to pain, or indulge in a grim humor over his troubles. But they, too, do not, from their heart, take a cheerful, contented view of afflictions; to them, too, "chastening seemeth to be grievous, not joyous." Their consolations are shams, shallow vaporings of an empty heart.

Cross bearing is a grace. "Unto you," says Paul, "*it is given* in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to *suffer* for His sake," Phil. 1, 29. Comforting the afflicted, leading them to view their trials as blessings, is also a grace, bestowed by "the God of all comfort," 1 Cor. 1, 3—5. Paul had learned to "glory in tribulations also," after he had attained to peace with God by faith in his Lord Jesus Christ, Rom. 5, 1 ff. To his mind, enlightened by the Gospel of God's love, chastenings yielded "the peaceable fruit of righteousness," Hebr. 12, 11; they exercised his faith and taught him sweet uses of adversity, filling his life with the wisdom that is from on high. In the text before us the apostle states the conclusion which he had reached after observing the sufferings of this present time. But when he says, "I reckon," he does not venture a vague guess, nor advance a plausible reason; for what he states in the verses following is a very unusual, unearthly view of human suffering. Only the Spirit, who molded his thoughts and gave him utterance, could have caused him to calculate on the troubles of God's saints as he does in this text. We have here:—

THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF SUFFERING: IT IS NOT WORTH MENTIONING.

1. *Because it is brief.*

The sufferings of Christians are sufferings "of this present time." They do not extend beyond the end of this present life, or of the world;

either death or Judgment Day will put a stop to them. What is a man's life compared to eternity! Eighty years are less than a drop in the ocean of endless existence. There will be an end of all pain and sorrow, Rev. 21, 4. And that end is near. Christians are in heaviness only "for a season," for a little while, 1 Pet. 1, 6; John 16, 19. 20.

This view of the speedy cessation of our suffering must hush the complaining mouth. It is unjust and ungrateful to magnify trifles. The Christian who worries while suffering questions the truth of the divine assurance that God will help him, and that right early, Ps. 46, 5. With his shortsighted eyes of the flesh he sees only his immediate surroundings and his miserable present. He needs the keen eye of faith which pierces the gloom that enwraps him, and widens his horizon, revealing to him the fact that he is actually but a few steps from the goal of his deliverance.

However, this view is possible only to the Christian. The future presents a dismal prospect to the unbeliever: he foresees no end to his suffering, but only greater, interminable agony ahead. To him the sufferings of this present life are but the beginning of a worse fate. His mouth must be filled with cries of distress and repining. In order to institute this apostolic calculation on the briefness of suffering, one must know Him who said, "A little while."

2. Because it is common.

The apostle (vv. 19—23) unrolls a vast panorama of woe: all creation is in distress; the earth is filled with groans, every fiber filled with life quivers and trembles with pain. "The bondage of corruption," the woeful consequences of sin, is upon the entire creature world. Also the brutes suffer with man. Sin has changed earth from an abode of happiness to a vale of tears. Among men there is no one without trouble. "Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward," Job 5, 7. Among the children of God none must be without chastisement, Hebr. 12, 8. The universality of suffering on earth serves to remind Christians of their common sinful origin with all other men, of their common inclination to sin, and is a faint exhibition to them of what they should get if they received what they deserve.

The suffering Christian, accordingly, does not imagine that some strange thing is happening to him, 1 Pet. 4, 12. He has about him a vast army of comrades of the cross. And if he opens the records of the past, he is surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, all of whom have passed through much tribulation, Hebr. 11, 32—12, 1. Now, in a colony of lepers one sufferer would hardly complain to the other because of his leprosy. In a poorhouse one inmate would not bewail his poverty to the other. The commonness and equality of suffering deprives the individual sufferer of most of his ground for complaint.

But again the eye of faith is necessary in order to see the point which the apostle is here making. The natural man is selfish also in pain; he parades his troubles with a sickly sentimentality as if he were an exceptional martyr; he craves pity like a peevish, spoiled child. To bear one's share of the common lot of woe one must have been taught what sin is and what are its natural effects, and he must know the Savior from sin.

3. Because it is light.

The apostle has not only calculated the extent of the sufferings of Christians, both as regards time and space; he has also computed their weight. He balances the present affliction with the future glory of God's children, and lo! he finds they cannot be "compared" at all. His griefs will not merely be ended, so as to leave him an emotionless blank, capable neither of joy nor grief; he will not simply pass into a state of forgetfulness in which all faculties of his soul have become dulled into unconsciousness; but his griefs will be positively mended. When their end comes, something else will commence for him. The service of vanity and the bondage of corruption will be exchanged for the glorious liberty of the children of God; groans will change to laughter. A season of never-ending refreshing will begin for him in the presence of the Lord; fullness of joy and pleasures evermore will be his meed and portion when he has quit this vale of tears. His present affliction is light, a mere straw; his future glory will be of exceeding and eternal weight, 2 Cor. 4, 17. The bounty of his Lord will fairly load him with imperishable gifts, 1 Pet. 1, 4.

The lonely exile does not greatly mind his privations during his homeless wandering, when reliable information has been brought to him that he is about to be restored to his home of ease and affluence. The buried miner whom the rescuing party has already reached forgets his battle with hunger and thirst and his feebleness at the thought that in a short time he will see the light of the world and the faces of his loved ones again. The moments before he is taken out of his involuntary grave he spends not in sad complaints but in glad praises. So does the prospect which faith holds out to the suffering Christian of the glory that shall be revealed in him, subdue his grief, calm his boisterous heart, and arrest his tongue when it is about to issue a wail or a cry.

But "the firstfruits of the Spirit," the faith-creating work of the Spirit in us, conversion to God, justification for Christ's sake by grace through faith, are necessary in order that a suffering sinner may make this apostolic estimate of human suffering his own and believingly say: "I also reckon," etc.
